Aurangabad Sculptures

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for

MY FATHER

whose death followed my birth

and

whose memory is but a name

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Calcutta University
26 January, 1966 AMITA RAY

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Introductory Words

Situated not very far from two richer, more elaborate and celebrated centres of almost contemporary art and religion represented by two long and magnificent series of sculptured and painted caves, one at Ajanta more than 60 miles to the north north-east and another at Ellora about 18 miles to the north north-west, the relatively smaller and less pretentious rock-hewn caves at Aurangabad sheltering an exquisite series of sculptures in bold relief, have so far failed to attract the attention they should have deserved from lovers and historians of Indian art. Not so varied in quantity as at Buddhist Ajanta and Ellora, or so rich and monumental in quality as at Brahmanical Ellora and Elephanta, the sculptural wealth of Aurangabad caves nevertheless has an aesthetic charm and quality as well as technical competence that compare very favourably with those of the Buddhist sculptures of the other two centres. Indeed, there are a few examples at Aurangabad, which in their dignified refinement of mood, subtlety of expression, delicate and sensitive plasticity, their strong and elongated physiognomical form and their technical adequacy, would even surpass the charm of the Buddhist sculptures of the other two more well-known centres. The sculptures of Ellora are increasingly attracting attention of serious students and scholars in the field of Indian art and iconography, with those of Ajanta following closely on the heels. This attention is well-deserved without doubt, but one may be allowed to plead, on evidence, that the sculptures of Aurangabad also deserve a little more and better recognition than has hitherto been extended to them. Even in recent years the Aurangabad sculptures have sometimes been characterised as conventional and as being of poorer aesthetic quality and technical achievement than those of Ellora and Ajanta. It is somewhat difficult to accept a judgement of this kind. The following paragraphs are therefore being offered as an attempt to present the case of Aurangabad sculptures with a plea for their revaluation in the context of contemporary Indian art and cultural ideology.

1. *Location*

The medieval city of Aurangabad is situated in a valley between the Sahyādri and the Sitara ranges of hills which are but eastern extensions of the ancient Sahyādri. The slopes and the bases of these hills are skirted by basaltic dykes in all directions. A little over a mile to the north of the city, along the sides of the Sahyādri, at a height of about 700 feet, there are three groups of caves hewn into the rock and scattered over a distance of a mile and half. The first group comprising one *chaitya* hall and four *vihāras* (cave I to V) is situated almost north to the Begampura suburb of the city (fig. 1); the second consisting of four *vihāras* is about seven furlongs to the east of the first (cave VI to IX), and the third comprising three caves (cave X to XIII), apparently incompletely excavated and therefore looking like natural caverns, is further to the east of the second group.

Judging by the iconography of the sculptures, all the caves but one, the last, are Buddhist in religious affiliation. None of the caves contain any inscription, but from the form and style of their architectural and sculptural details one may date the monastic activities of this region as belonging to about the sixth and seventh century A.D., when the Chālukyas of Vātāpīkoṇḍa (modern, Badami) were at the height of their glory as rulers of the Deccan.

But Aurangabad does not seem to have come into any significant status as a city at that time, though it is permissible to assume that the place must have been a centre of some importance since we know from the *Vinaya* texts that Buddhist monastic settlements were permitted to be reared up 'not very far from and yet not very near to' large centres of population. The choice of the site seems to have been determined not so much by the existence of any flourishing centre of administration or of trade and commerce as by the fact that it lay by the side of the ancient caravan highway that ran from the ancient western coastal ports of Śūrpāraka (Pāli, Suppāraka; modern, Sopara) and Cellani (modern, Kalyan), through Nasik (ancient, Govardhana) and Pithalkhora where the route crossed

the Indhyādri, then through Ellora (ancient, Elapura at the foot of the Charaṇādri) and Devagiri (the capital of the Sevana or Yādava kings; medieval, Daulatabad), to Paithan (Sans., Pratishṭhānapura; Pali, Patiṭṭhāna), the capital of the Sātavāhanas of the western Deccan, which seems to have been the point of termination. It is this ancient caravan route which is now represented by the Paithan—Aurangabad — Ellora — Chalisgaon — Manmad — Nasik — Thana road. There seems to have been another ancient caravan route going straight northwards from Paithan *via* Aurangabad, Ellora, and Pithalkhora to Ajanta, and from Ajanta again straight north to Ujjayinī and Vidiśā. It was in fact within walking distance of this highway that the celebrated series of Ajanta caves were situated.

The medieval and modern town of Aurangabad does not seem to have come into any prominence before the end of the 15th century when the Nizam Shahis of Ahmadnagar were in power. With the fall of Ahmadnagar Malik Ambar, the Abyssinian minister of the Nizam Shahi kings, set up his head-quarters at this place which was then called Khirki or the 'window', serving indeed as the window of the Deccan to the north and of the north to the Deccan. Khirki had by that time robbed Devagiri, later Daulatabad, of its importance as a capital city.

It is well-known that, archaeologically speaking, the caves of Ajanta remained lost to civilisation for long centuries. But the Ellora rock-cut sculptures and temples had escaped this fate. They continued to remain living examples of Indian art, religion and culture through the centuries. The Aurangabad caves lay not very far from those of Ellora; they were also within walking distance of the same ancient caravan highway. Yet they seem to have shared the same fate as those of Ajanta, and it was not until about the fourth decade of the nineteenth century that the existence of these caves seems to have been made known to contemporary civilisation. It was only when Bradley gave an account of them and had much of the *debris* cleared out of some of these caves that they came to attract some attention of scholars. The first descriptive account of these caves by James Burgess was published in 1878, which was followed, two years later, by another short descriptive account by James Furgusson and James Burgess.

2. *Historical Background*

The Sahyādri region of western India shelters in its bosom a long series of rock-hewn caves—*vihāras* and *chaityas* of various sizes, proportions, forms and styles—ranging in date from about the second century B.C. to about the ninth century A.D. At its eastern-most extensions there lay the long series of caves of Ajanta, Pithalkhora, Ellora, Badami and Aurangabad; at the western fringes, more or less along the coast line, grew up another long series of caves beginning from Bhaja and Karle and ending with those at Elephanta, including those of Nasik, Kondivte, Kondane, Vedsa, Junar, Kanheri, Lonad and other places. For about a millennium, with but a break of nearly 150 years (c.250—400 A.D.), there seems to have been an intense artistic activity in this region, obviously nursed and inspired by an equally intense socio-economic and religious life. The art of Aurangabad as of Ajanta and Ellora, or of any other place in this region, can, therefore, be better understood and appreciated in the context of this socio-economic and religious life.

Politically speaking, from the beginning of the Christian era, at any rate, to about the middle of the third century A.D., this region was under the domination of the Sātavāhanas who had their capital at Paithan, though their authority was more than once contested by the Śaka Kshatrapas. The Sātavāhanas were an enlightened dynasty of kings, and it was during their regime, and more or less through their active patronage, that the earliest series of caves of western India seem to have been carved out, the caves at Bhaja, Karle and Nasik, caves IX and X at Ajanta and cave IV at Aurangabad, for example. The second burst of creative energy in this region seems to have taken place in about the fifth century A.D., when the Vākāṭakas were in power in this region, a dynasty that was responsible for at least a few caves at Ajanta and their remarkable paintings and sculptures as well as for more than one inscription. But the greatest burst of boundless artistic and spiritual energy was witnessed for about 300 years (c.535—850 A.D.) when the early

Chālukyas and the Rāshṭrakūṭas were ruling the region, the former with their capital at Vātāpī or Badami (c.520—757 A.D.), and the latter with their capital at Mānyakshetra or Malkhed. Indeed, these two dynasties seem to have been responsible for the largest number of significant caves at Ajanta and Ellora.

But much more important than the political background was the socio-economic pattern of the region during this period. Already during the period represented by the *Jātakas* and other early Buddhist texts the coastal regions of western India had developed a number of important coastal ports in the Kathiawad, Gujarat and Maharashtra regions: Bhṛigukachha (Pāli, Bharukachha; Greek, Barygaza), Saurāshṭra (Pāli, Suraṭṭha; modern, Surat), Śūrpāraka (Pāli, Suppāraka; modern, Sopara), for example. The port *par excellence* of the Maharashtra region was the last one. But from about the middle of the first century A.D., the beginnings of Roman sea-going trade in the Indian Ocean seem to have brought about a great transformation in India's coastal trade. The evidence of the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, read with the geographical account of Ptolemy, definitely indicates that a large number of coastal ports grew up all along the Indian coast line, beginning from Minnagara and Barygaza in the west to Tamralipti in the east, the most important ones along the coast-line of the Maharashtra region being Sopara, Kalyan, and Thana.

The most important inland mart of western India, that fed these ports was, of course, Paithan, during the Sātavāhana period, and Badami, during that of the Chālukyas. The most dynamic period of this intense maritime trade activity was from about the middle of the first to about the end of the fifth century A.D., but even after the break up of the Roman empire India continued to enjoy a rich trade balance through her trade with the western world, mainly through the agency of the Ptolemian empire. But, by about the beginning of the seventh century, the Indo-Roman trade was transformed into what may be called the Indo-Arab trade, in which the Iranians also seem to have had a certain share. That there was an intimate intercourse between India on the one hand and the Iranian and Arab world on the other, is indicated by more than one painted panel at Ajanta and reference in Chālukya

and Rāshṭrakūṭa inscriptions, to the Tājikas (obviously the Muslim Arabs and Iranians) with whom the Chālukyas and the Rāshṭrakūṭas seem to have entered into occasional alliances. Whether such alliances were motivated exclusively by exigencies of contemporary politics or not is difficult to say. But when one views it in the context of contemporary rivalries and interests in trade and commerce in the eastern world one cannot but feel that there was a strong economic motive also at the back of it all.

It is now well-recognised that India's overseas trade with the western world, and partly overland trade with central Asia, during the first five or six centuries of the Christian era, were primarily responsible for the rich flow of gold into India, that eventually made the Gupta culture-period of Indian history literally the golden period. Foreign trade led, very understandably, to a quickening of the indigenous arts and crafts and also to agricultural and other industrial activities. The balance of trade thus enjoyed by India led directly to an improvement of the economic situation of a considerable section of the community and indirectly to a quickening of man's creative impulses and activities. That the regions near and around the coastal ports which felt the direct impact of trade and commercial activities, would experience this quickening in a much larger and deeper manner than other regions, was but natural.

This would perhaps explain why there were such bursts of creative energy in the Maharashtra region on the one hand and in the Andhra-Pallava region on the other, during the centuries we are speaking of. That this explanation is not based on mere guess work would be evident from an analysis of the donative records of not only Jagayyapeta, Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda, but also of those of the caves of western India, of Karle and Nasik, for example. By far the largest number of these donative records in respect of the west-Indian caves, emanate from *śreshṭhīs* and *sārthavāhas*, *vanijas* and well-to-do agricultural house-holders; a small minority came from amongst the *bhikshus* themselves and from the lay worshippers belonging to royal and noble families, and still a smaller minority from the kings and princes who, during these centuries, subscribed mostly to the Brahmanical faith. There

can be no doubt that whatever donations were made by the *bhikshus* themselves must have come from the other sources mentioned above. It would be evident that the material wherewithal for the erection and maintenance of these elaborate monastic establishments and their paintings and sculptures, represented the surplus wealth of the community, and the creative energy that was responsible for them, represent the emotional and intellectual experience of the quickened life-process itself of a civilisation sustained by an active trade and commerce and by an equally active social intercourse with other peoples and civilisations.

Art certainly follows its own laws of efflorescence and evolution, but even so, such efflorescence and evolution have to be understood, in fact, can be better understood, when the total socio-economic milieu is constantly kept in view, the milieu in which an art is born.

The socio-economic milieu just spoken of in respect of the west-Indian caves of the Maharashtra region, can still be better understood by a reference to the religious milieu of the times, since religion was a strong motivation in contemporary society.

3. *Religious Background*

It is well-known that all the important early ruling dynasties of this region—the Sātavāhanas, the Vākāṭakas, the Chālukyas and the Rāshṭrakūṭas—owed allegiance to the Brahmanical faith; yet the fact remains that all the rock-cut establishments of the western Deccan including those at Aurangabad, were generally Buddhist in religious affiliation, at any rate up to about the end of the sixth century. Only at Badami and Ellora there are Brahmanical, at Ellora also Jain establishments, datable perhaps from about the end of the sixth and beginning or middle of the ninth century respectively. It is also equally well-known that despite their formal allegiance to the Brahmanical faith all the royal dynasties referred to above, were patrons of Buddhism and its monastic order. It is also permissible to assume that the Buddhist *Saṁgha* received social, moral and economic support and sustenance not only from its own lay devotees but also from the followers of the Brahmanical faiths and cults.

But Buddhism in those days was a dynamic religion, and in a live dynamic religion doctrinal changes, and hence corresponding changes in the interpretation of its myths and legends, were but inevitable. It may safely be presumed that when Aśoka Maurya sent the Thera Mahādhammarakkhita to the Maharashtra region, he was introducing the Theravāda doctrine of Buddhism into western Deccan. Later, during the Sātavāhana period, the form of Buddhism that seems to have flourished in this region was perhaps that of the Sarvāstivādins. But even during the rule of the later Sātavāhanas, the influence of the Sarvāstivādin school seems to have been contested by that of the Mahāsaṁghikas. The cave at Karle records the gift of a village as well as of a nine-celled hall to the adherents of the latter sect. Obviously the Mahāsaṁghikas had developed a centre at Karle and must have exercised considerable influence over the people of this region. It may be remembered, in this connection, that the Buddhist establishments of Nagarjunakonda belonging to the third and fourth centuries A.D., record

the strong influence of the Mahāsaṁghikas. When Fa-hien, the well-known Chinese pilgrim, came to India he learnt from hearsay (since he did not visit the Deccan) that the people there subscribed to bad and erroneous views and did not follow the law of the Buddha. Presumably he was referring to the heterodox Mahāsaṁghikas as well as to the followers of the Brahmanical faiths. That there was also a large number of followers of the Sarvāstivādin school in western Deccan till as late as the seventh century, cannot be denied. I-Tsing, another famous Chinese traveller who visited India towards the third quarter of the seventh century, records this fact and says that the Sarvāstivādins were only less honoured in the Maharashtra country than in Magadha. It is significant that in the Deccan, where Buddhism, relatively speaking, was never very strong, the heterodox sects of the religion found a congenial soil. Yuan Chuang who visited Maharashtra sometime towards 630 A.D., tells us that there were one hundred *vihāras* or monastic establishments in Maharashtra and an equal number in Karnataka, in which lived some six thousand *bhikshus* with a total Buddhist population of about ten thousand, and that the number of heretics there were very large.

Besides the Sarvāstivādins and the Mahāsaṁghikas there were also Mahāyānists in western Deccan, who must have been responsible for the majority of the caves at Ajanta, for instance, where the Buddha in human form is found seated or standing alone in glorious divinity not unoften attended by two Bodhisattvas, one on each side, and it is well-known that the Bodhisattva conception is basically a Mahāyānist one. But at Ajanta there is no indubitable evidence of Bodhisattvas being accompanied by or associated with their Śaktis, nor of female deities like Bhṛikuṭi, Chuṇḍā, Sarasvatī or Mahāmāyūrī making their appearance.

At Ellora however, not only that the Bodhisattva idea has taken deep root to the extent that the divine Buddha in human form is attended by as many as six, eight or even ten Bodhisattvas, but also that Bodhiśaktis and female divinities of diverse forms—Bhṛikuṭi, Chuṇḍā, Sarasvatī, and Mahāmayūrī, for example—make their frequent appearance. There is thus at Ellora a clear indication that a new form of Buddhism with a new myth of its own and perhaps also

a new ideology and way of life, had come to assert itself. Indeed, the expression of this new form, myth and ideology at Ellora is varied, rich and elaborate. At Kanheri and Aurangabad there is not much evidence of this new form of Buddhism, but nevertheless there is an indirect impress of its impact. Aurangabad has also the added significance of a subtler transformation of the rich and elaborate iconography of Ellora into a more human and perhaps aesthetically more significant appeal.

Evidently these doctrinal and mythological changes, with whatever they connote in terms of iconography, ideology and way of life, was affected by the philosophy of Yogāchāra from about the fourth and fifth century A.D., and by the gradual emergence of Vajrayāna doctrine with its own mythology and pantheon of gods and goddesses from about the sixth and seventh centuries. It is this doctrine, mythology and pantheon that finds its direct and rich expression at Ellora, and in a lesser degree, quantitatively speaking, and only indirectly, at Aurangabad.

One of the more important though indirect hypothesis of Yogāchāra was that the human body was the receptacle of all intellectual, religious and spiritual experiences, that is, all such experiences were but human. It followed, therefore, that the world of the senses, howsoever unreal in an absolute and idealistic sense, was not relatively so. Such an ideology naturally tended towards bringing about almost a sea-change in the viewing of the world and its affairs by the Buddhists at any rate, a change that was already being slowly effected by the pressure of the Mahāyāna doctrine. When to this was added the doctrine of the Śakti or the feminine energy as being integral to the Bodhisattva, it came gradually to imply and slowly to nurse a new attitude towards women and all that such attitude connoted. This is reflected not only in the iconography of the Bodhisattvas and their Śaktis and in the female divinities in general, but also in the total attitudes, poses, *bhaṅgas* and *bhaṅgis* of all other ancillary figures of devotees and dancers, of *apsaras*, *gandharvas* and *kinnaras* along with the total atmosphere in which they moved and had their being.

The Yogāchāra ideology was not exclusive to Buddhism alone. Indeed, during the Gupta culture-period it seems to have been

all pervasive, affecting Brahmanism as well, at any rate in so far as concrete visualisation in terms of art and iconographic form was concerned. This will be evident from even a cursory examination of the Brahmanical sculptures of the Gupta classical period, especially of those of Khoh, Sarnath and Mathura, for example, as well as of those of Badami, Parel, Ellora and Elephanta of succeeding centuries. The Brahmanical sculptures of Aurangabad too, could not but feel the inevitable impact of this ideology. This will be evident when we come to discuss the art and iconography of not only the Buddhist images which are by far the largest in number, but also of the few Brahmanical ones of the recently discovered cave at Aurangabad.

4. *Nature of Rock-cut Monuments*

The caves at Aurangabad, along with the Buddhist ones at Ellora, represent the penultimate stage, the Brahmanical and the Jaina ones being the ultimate one, of the history of the rock-cut caves of western India. These monastic establishments have often been described as examples of cave architecture, which is perhaps technically a wrong description. It will be readily accepted that these are no constructions in the architectural sense and there was no problem of building upwards from the bottom involved in them. The problem before the artist or craftsman was not one of an architect but of a sculptor who had to sculpt out a form in simulation of constructions in impermanent materials like wood and bamboo, that stood before his eyes, from the bosom of a live rock. This rock he attacked with his hammer and chisel, either from the sides or from the top. The caves with their pillars, facades, roofs etc. are, therefore, strictly speaking, sculptures in huge dimensions, sculptures in simulation of architecture of given shapes.

Secondly, speaking of rock-cut sculptures, one must always be conscious of the material that the artist has to deal with. In ordinary sculptures the artist deals with an isolated slab or boulder of stone, big or small, in terms of his theme and the nature and availability of the material, whereas in rock-cut sculptures, he is concerned instead with a live rock of huge dimensions. This fact of dimension and proportion alone calls for, in the latter case, a different quality of creative vision and energy and perhaps also different tools, skills and techniques. Critics and historians of Indian art have often compared the sculptures of Bhaja, Karle and Nasik, for example, with the early Buddhist narrative sculptures of Barhut, Sanchi and Bodhgaya. Such comparison, to my mind, is unreal, if not unfair, since we are confronted not only with two different sets of materials differing in character, but the technique too is somewhat different, nothing to speak of vision and conception. These differences explain the difference in the relative size, dimension and proportion as well as in the earthy heaviness of form of the early rock-cut sculptures of

the western Deccan, of Bhaja, Karle and Nasik, for example, from those of the early narrative sculptures of central India.*

But Ajanta, Ellora, Elephanta and Aurangabad, sculpturally speaking, offer a view somewhat different from that of the early west-Indian rock-cut sculptures. In-between lies the entire gamut of sculptural experience of the Gupta culture period, a period that reflects all the changes that had come about in Buddhist and Brahmanical ideology and way of life in the meanwhile. Yet at Ajanta, Ellora, Elephanta and Aurangabad, more particularly at the last three places, the unique character of the live rock persists in the proportions of these sculptures, in their relation to space and in their general vigour of form.

*But Pithalkora in western Deccan is a notable exception. Here the rock-cut reliefs of the early centuries of the Christian era belong frankly to the common denominator of early narrative reliefs of central India. Though they are carved out of live-rock they have not much in common, stylistically speaking, with the rock-cut sculptures of Bhaja, Karle and Nasik, for example. Yet in certain figures Pithalkora aims at monumentality which seems to be thwarted by their preferred adherence to the laws of frontality and the second dimension.

5. *Description*

From the point of view of architectural form Aurangabad has hardly anything new to contribute to the history of west-Indian rock-cut caves. There are only three or four caves which are from this point of view somewhat significant. Yet one who has any acquaintance with the *vihāra* or *chaitya* form in the rock-cut caves of western India, at Karle, Vedsa and Ajanta or of the earlier phase at Ellora, for example, will not find anything at Aurangabad, even in respect of the more significant ones, which one has not done at the other places.

Of the thirteen caves, cave IV, sadly in ruins, seems to have been the earliest and carved out during the Sātavāhana period. Small in size and proportion (22″×38″) its architectural form is that of a *chaitya* with a barrel roof and apse (fig. 2), supposed to be supported by seventeen octagonal pillars. Almost at the farthest end of the cave stands the *stūpa-chaitya*, carved out of solid rock, which probably supported an wooden umbrella. What is interesting to note is the fact that the rafters of the roof and apse are nothing but simulation of wooden construction, which is so common a feature of west-Indian caves. The *chaitya* hall does not contain any figure-sculpture and there is hardly any architectural ornamentation but for the carvings representing the *chaitya* windows or berm-pattern railings so well-known in early Buddhist monastic establishments. The facade of the cave has fallen down, but from well-known examples at Karle and Vedsa it is easy to visualise what it was like with its great sun-window. The shape and form of the pillars, the simplicity of the architectural form and the absence of any sculptural embellishment seem to support the early date which has been usually assigned to the cave.

All the other caves belong evidently to a much later date which is not earlier than the sixth or seventh century A.D.

Cave I which seems to have been left incomplete, is a *vihāra*, consisting of what was intended as a main hall with twenty-eight pillars, a verandah running all along the front of the hall and a

projected portico supported on four pillars, the ground-plan and elevation following more or less those of cave IV at Ajanta. The back wall of the verandah is pierced at the centre by a door and one window on each side. What is most interesting in this cave are the shapes and forms of the pillars and their decorations and the sculptures in high relief that embellish the three walls of the verandah and its central door. All the eight pillars that are supposed to support the verandah, have square bases carved with seated dwarfs; round or polygonal shafts; capitals elaborately carved and provided with brackets composed of female figures (*śālabhañjikās*) with dwarfs and other attendants; and rounded corbels carved with flying figures and mythical animals with riders, technically called *śārdūlas*, (*cf.* figs. 4, 5). A few pillar-capitals are of the well-known vase and foliage type, so common at Ellora and Ajanta. The central door is carved presumably with the images of Gaṅgā and Yamunā at the top of the jambs and with those of a *nāga* and *nāginī* at the base. The side-windows are framed by carvings of *mithuna* couples. Outside the verandah on the left wall is a row of seven seated Buddhas with a *chaurī*-bearer at each end, all carved in high relief. Evidently the last figure represents Gautama, the historical Buddha, and the rest the six previous Buddhas. Inside the verandah of the left one is the carved figure of a seated Buddha flanked by Avalokiteśvara on the left, holding a lotus and a *chaurī* and wearing an antelope skin over his left shoulder, and by Vajrapāṇi on his right, holding by the left hand the *vajra* on the knot of his sash at the hip and the *chaurī* by the right hand. Exactly a similar panel is carved on the right wall of the verandah. Another figure of the Buddha seated on a full-blown lotus supported by *nāgas*, is carved on the wall of the verandah between the left door and window.

Forty feet lower in level than cave I is the next, cave II, which seems to have been a place of worship and not an abode or *vihāra* for the monks, since no cell appears to have been excavated for the purpose. It consists of a hall and a verandah which has fallen down, leaving traces of two square pillars and pilasters. The front of the hall itself is also served by two square pillars and pilasters, the upper portions of which are decorated by full and half-lotuses carved in

low relief. On the left wall of the verandah is a large panel showing Buddha seated in *dhyāna mudrā* and flanked by two *chaurī*-bearers, one of whom is easily identifiable as Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi. Inside the hall is a shrine with a wide *pradakshiṇa patha* running all around. On each side of the door leading to the shrine stands a more than life-size (about 9′) figure of a *dvārapāla*, easily identifiable from their respective *lāñchhanas*, as Avalokiteśvara on the right and Mañjuśrī on the left, both with attendant *nāgas* supporting tall and slender lotus stalks. At the base of the jambs of the shrine door are seated figures of what can be identified as Jambhala and at the top of the door is a frieze of small shrines, each containing a seated figure of Buddha flanked by *chaurī*-bearers. Against the back wall of the shrine itself is a huge, more than life-size image of the Buddha seated in the so-called western fashion, in *dharmachakra mudrā*, on a lion throne and flanked above by flying figures on each side. The right and left walls of the shrine as well as those of the processional path and the right wall of the verandah are all covered with panels showing figures of the Buddha in various *mudrās—dhyāna*, *vyākhyāna* and *dharmachakra*—each flanked by *chaurī*-bearers and seated on lotus-thrones supported by *nāgas*.

Cave III is by far the most elaborate and perhaps the finest cave in the first group, both for its decorative work and its figure sculptures. Here is a complete and intact *vihāra* consisting of a pillared hall in the centre (41½′×42½′) with two chambers, one in front and another at the back, at the four corners of which are four cells, two on each side. Between the two cells on each side is a chapel, the floors of the cells and chapels being raised above that of the hall. In front of the hall is a long and wide verandah with four pillars in front and an open chamber at each end. At the back of the central hall and with ingress from it, is a small rectangular hall which serves as an ante-chamber leading to a smaller square that serves as the main shrine.

The most interesting and arresting items in this *vihāra* are its richly formed and carved pillars (figs. 4, 5) and pilasters which are of a great variety, and its rich wealth of small and large sculptures. The twelve pillars supposed to be supporting the roof of the central hall have more or less the same features: a high square base

with dwarfs or *mithuna* couples at the corners, supporting an octagonal shaft divided either into spiral flutes or into bands with various decorations of vegetal patterns and human figures; then there is the capital which are of the usual vase and foliage type or are vertically fluted with dwarfs or female figures at the corners; and then finally at the top is the corbel carved with *mithuna* pairs at the centre and with animal and rider and scroll foliage at the sides. On the inner side of the square above the twelve pillars is a carved frieze of miniature shrines in which there are seated Buddhas and other figures. Some of the pilasters of the side walls are very richly carved with full and half lotuses, the roundel of the full lotus sheltering carvings of amorous scenes of exquisite charm (fig. 25). There are pillars and pilasters elsewhere also, some with elaborate carvings and provided with brackets carved with *śārdūla* and female figures, others being fairly plain but having the same architectural features. There is at least one narrative scene, evidently representing *Sutasoma Jātaka,* carved on one narrow frieze above the four pillars at the back of the front aisle.

As in cave II the door of the shrine at the back is decorated presumably with figures of Gaṅgā and Yamunā at the top and with those of *nāgas* at the base of the jambs. Inside the shrine against the back wall is a more than life-size, huge figure of the Buddha in *dharmachakra mudrā* seated on a lion throne, flanked by two huge standing figures bearing *chaurīs*, the one at the right being evidently the representation of Mañjuśrī, the other, a crowned and bejewelled figure on the left, being evidently Avalokiteśvara holding a *kamaṇḍalu.* Iconographically speaking, the representation of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in the form as we have it here, seems to indicate a parallel with the figures of Avalokiteśvara in cave XI at Ellora, from which it perhaps follows that here we have an interpretation of the iconography of Avalokiteśvara which is contemporary with that of caves XI and XII of Ellora. In front of the huge image of the shrine is a group of kneeling figures of men and women, six on the right and seven on the left, some with folded hands held in front of the chest, some with garlands, but all with half-closed eyes and in deep self-absorption in a spirit of intense and sincere devotion (figs. 14, 15, 16).

All that is left of cave V is the shrine with its *pradakshiṇa patha*, on the walls of which are panels representing the Buddha seated on lotus throne supported by *nāgas*, and inside the shrine is the huge figure of the Buddha seated in the *dharmachakra mudrā*.

All that remains of the cave VI is the long 9′ wide verandah with one cell at each end, and the processional path which runs on three sides of a roughly square shrine provided with a rectangular ante-chamber facing the verandah. The right and left sides of the processional path provides ingress to three cells on each side, while the third or the rear side of the path provides similar ingress to two chapels, one at each end. The ante-chamber in front of the main shrine is provided with two square pillars and pilasters richly carved in full and half-lotuses in front.

The two chapels at the two corners of the rear *pradakshiṇa patha* are provided each with two *dvārapālas*, easily identifiable from the *lāñchhanas* as Manjuśrī and Vajrapāṇi. Against the back wall of the shrine itself is the huge figure of the Buddha seated in *dharmachakra mudrā* in the so-called western fashion and flanked by two huge standing figures bearing *chaurīs*, evidently representing Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi as can be judged from their *lāñchhanas* In front of the main image, on each side of the shrine, are two groups of kneeling worshippers five men on one side and five women on the other, all sadly abraded, but undoubtedly of the same attitude and atmosphere as those of worshipping figures of cave III (figs. 14, 15, 16).

On each side of the door leading to the shrine there is a huge standing figure of a *dvārapāla* who is perhaps none other than Manjuśrī with his left hand resting on the knot of his sash. A female figure stands to the left on a lotus and holds a bunch of flowers and a male figure stands to the right offering a lotus bowl. The *dvārapāla* on the right is evidently Vajrapāṇi with a fierce looking male figure on the right. Figures of standing *nāgas* and seated Jambhala decorate the base of the jambs of the door leading to the main shrine. Each end of the side walls of the ante-chamber in front of the main shrine, is divided into two panels, each containing a female figure standing under a tree with a seated figure of Jambhala holding a purse in his left hand, at the bottom.

It should be pointed out that there are traces of painted decorations here and there in both caves III and VI.

Cave VII, perhaps the finest of the second group, because of its wealth of sculptures, is a *vihāra*-cum-temple of more or less the same description as that of cave VI, with a central shrine provided with a *pradakshiṇa patha* all around affording ingress to six cells, three on the right and three on the left, and two chapels, one at each end of the back wall. The central square sheltering the shrine is approached from a long and wide verandah (34′ × 14′), affording ingress to two chapels, one on each side. The verandah is provided with four pillars in front and an equal number of pilasters on the sides, carved with full and half lotuses. Along the back wall of the chapel to the left of the verandah is a long frieze of eight carved figures standing on lotuses: at one end is the figure of a standing Buddha; at the other end stands a Bodhisattva holding a lotus downward in his left hand, perhaps Padmapāṇi; in-between are six female figures that have been usually identified as those of Śaktis of the Vajrayāna pantheon, though there is nowhere any definite attribute to warrant such identification. It may be pointed out in this connection that in the Buddhist series of caves at Ellora we have a variety of feminine figures that from their cognisances can be definitely identified as divinities of the same pantheon: Amoghasiddhi Tārā, Bhṛikuṭi Tārā, Tārā with Mañjuśrī, Mahāmayūrī, Sarasvatī, Jāṅgulī, Vasundharā, Chuṇḍa etc. for example.

The back wall of the right hand chapel has also a similar panel but representing Jambhala and Hārīti flanked by female *chaurī*-bearers. The verandah is connected with a central shrine by means of a central door flanked by two windows. On each side of this door is a large panel, that on the left representing what is popularly called the litany of Avalokiteśvara (fig. 3), which is represented elsewhere also in west-Indian caves. It shows a huge standing figure of Avalokiteśvara with his right hand holding an *akshamālā* and the left holding a tall lotus stalk. On both sides are carved, in eight panels, the eight miracles of the Bodhisattva, four on each. Above these scenes on each side of the head of the Bodhisattva, is a seated figure of the Buddha in *dharmachakra mudrā*. The panel on the right represents another huge standing figure with his left hand on his

sash and showing a *chaitya* in the elaborate crown on his head, evidently representing Mañjuśrī (fig. 8). He is flanked above on both sides by flying couples and dwarfs and below by a female figure and dwarf to the right and a male figure and dwarf to the left. The base of the jambs of the central doors are carved with male figures holding lotuses, and above the flanking windows are carved two elephants pouring water over a seated female figure, evidently the well-known Gaja-Lakshmī myth of early Buddhist iconography, perhaps symbolising the birth of the Buddha.

On each side of the door leading to the main shrine is a huge carved panel flanked by pilasters and representing a female figure standing on a lotus and attended by two other females and a dwarf (figs. 20, 21). That the figure is one of Tārā, hardly admits of any doubt. The female attendants one of whom leans on a male dwarf, remind one at once of a similar theme and composition at Ellora and Elephanta. Against the back wall of the shrine itself is a colossal figure of the Buddha seated in *dharmachakra mudrā* on a lion throne, and flanked by three seated Buddhas. On the left wall of the shrine is an exquisitely carved panel representing a girl dancing in accompaniment of music played by six other girls, three on each side, all deeply self-absorbed in the rhythm of the dance and the music (figs. 18, 19). The right wall of the shrine also exhibits another panel representing two figures, one a male and another a female, but both standing on lotuses and holding flowers, with dwarfs attending on them.

The two chapels at the back-end also contains the figures of the Buddha in the *dharmachakra mudrā* and flanked by *chaurī*-bearers who are easily identifiable as Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī.

All that remains of cave VIII which seems to have been an unfinished *vihāra*, consist of three doors presumably leading into a shrine flanked by two cells and a few sculptures very sadly mutilated.

A little further to the east and higher up on the hill is cave IX. Its facade has come down; what is extant now seems to be the remains of a big longitudinal hall, on the west wall of which is the colossal carved figure of the recumbent Buddha representing the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* of the Master. Along the back wall are two large panels each representing Tārā with her two attendants. At the left end of this wall stands the figure of a four armed Avalokiteśvara,

with a rosary in one of his right hands and wearing the antelope skin over his left shoulder. The side walls are provided with panels of seated and standing Buddhas, and the door leading to the shrine is flanked by *dvārapālas* who are none but Boddhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī. Through the back wall of the hall there are three pillared entrances to three chapels, each provided with a shrine sheltering the figure of the Buddha seated in the so-called western fashion, in *dharmachakra mudrā.* Figures of *dvārapālas*, evidently Bodhisattvas, and standing females holding lotuses, of Jambhala and *nāgas*, and also small panels of the Buddhas, some only partly finished, decorate the inner walls and door flanks of these shrines. There are also the usual pillars with capitals of vase and foliage type, carved sometimes only roughly and incompletely.

The three caves of the third group look more like natural caverns, only roughly hewn, and have hardly any sculptural and architectural significance.

An exciting thing in Indian archaeology is that almost every season of exploration and excavation brings forth new materials and obliges one to add to or revise one's knowledge in the light of new finds. This has happened at Aurangabad as well. Here has been recently brought to light a new cave, unfortunately in a very bad state of preservation, and perhaps of no architectural significance, but containing a series of sculptures (figs 12, 13) representing on one of its walls, presumably the Saptamātṛikās (Brāhmī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vaishṇavī, Vārāhī, Aindrī and Chāmuṇḍā), along with Śiva as *Ardhanārīśvara*, and a huge Gaṇeśa (figs. 23, 22) on another—all belonging to the Brahmanical pantheon. Unfortunately all the figures are very badly abraded; yet enough remains so as to indicate the likelihood of the above identifications.

The existence of a cave enshrining Puranic Brahmanical divinities side by side with other caves definitely affiliated with Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhism, calls perhaps for a word of explanation, since we have no evidence to argue that the Brahmanical sculptures were later than the Buddhist ones. Indeed from the point of view of form and style they seem to have been contemporaneous. The fact appears to be that a kind of co-existence of Buddhism, of Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna, for instance, and of Puranic Brahmanism,

was already in the process of being evolved in western Deccan, leading gradually towards the kind of eclecticism that one finds in eastern India from the eighth century onward, and finally towards syncretistic cults in eastern India and in the islands and countries of south-cast Asia. Aurangabad, along with Ellora, seems to represent the beginning of that process.

6. *Architectural Decorations*

From the above description of the caves it would be clear that Aurangabad does not offer any form or feature of *chaitya* or *vihāra* which can be called new or original, or even interesting from the point of view of conception, planning and execution, but for the particular feature of the main shrine being situated in the very centre of the *vihāra*, as in caves VI and VII, an architectural feature evidently borrowed from rock-cut Brahmanical shrines. But at the same time it would perhaps be somewhat unfair to ignore the exquisite craftsmanship of the carver that decorate the pillars and pilasters. These decorations reveal a rich variety of patterns and designs, some carved in high and bold relief, some in low. It is interesting to note that the content of these decorations are mostly from the world of nature, and whether the motifs are taken from human and animal life or from vegetal, they are frankly naturalistic, without any attempt towards abstraction, or any trace of geometrisation. It is easy to recognise that almost all the patterns and designs with their full and sinuous, apparently capricious curves and counter-curves, curling coquettishly as it were, are legacies of classical Gupta decorative art (figs. 4, 5). Yet at the same time one must also recognise that more than two centuries of almost continuous repetition has not been able to conventionalise them. On the contrary, their rhythm and harmony, with their rippled display of light and shade in harmonious distribution of surface and depth, continue to remain fresh. Every single pattern and design maintains a perfect balance and proportion, and all individual elements are composed in a manner so as to form an integrated whole. The cutting into the stone of the flowing lines and curves, and the subtle gradations and deep slants of the cuts themselves, are so sharp and precise that at places the stone-carving reminds one of the consummate craftsmanship of an ivory-carver or a jeweller. Indeed, one may be permitted to suggest that these decorations follow actually the technique of work of ivory-workers and gold or silversmiths who worked very carefully, slowly and precisely,

with smaller and sharper tools than the usual hammer and chisel of a stone sculptor. Fortunately there is more than one epigraphic evidence in support of such a hypothesis, the earliest emanating from one of the bas-reliefs of the Great Stupa at Sanchi, where it is recorded that the particular relief was the gift of the ivory-workers of Vidiśā. One who has any knowledge of the technique of ivory-carving and of the particular relief in stone, would easily recognise that the latter was not merely the gift, but actually simulation of the work of ivory-craftsmen, a hypothesis that finds eloquent support from the Begram ivory carvings of Afghanistan. But the Sanchi record is not the only one to support such a hypothesis. A short inscription on the outer right palm of a *yaksha* sculpture from Pithalkhora records that the particular sculpture was executed by one Kanhadāsa (Kṛishṇadāsa), a *hiraṇyakara* or goldsmith, who seems to have been responsible for the execution of another *yaksha* image from Kondane. We know from another inscription of the time of Gautamīputra Samisiri Yajña Sātakarṇi in the *chaitya* cave at Kanheri that carpenters also sometimes took to stone-carving.

7. *The Sculptures*

The chief importance of the Aurangabad caves lies, however, in the sculptured forms that embellish them. For convenience of analysis and description such forms can be classed in several groups. *First,* there is a group of Buddha figures mainly in the central shrines and the chapels where the Buddha is seated in *dharmachakra mudrā.* There can be no doubt that these were the central figures meant for worship and prayer and dominated the monastic estabishments. One cannot but feel curious that so far as the Aurangabad caves are concerned, the iconographic position and attitude of this central figure of worship should be the same in each case so as to suggest an unalterably accepted form.

Secondly, there is the group consisting of the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara, Padmapāṇi, Vajrapāṇi and Mañjuśrī (figs. 7, 8, 10), either as such or as *dvārapālas* bearing *chaurīs,* along with their attendants. There is at least one large panel in cave VII which represents the miracles of Avalokiteśvara in eight separate panels, four on each side of the huge standing figure of the Bodhisattva (fig. 3). This panel must also, therefore, be considered along with the Bodhisattva figures.

Closely allied to this group is the *third one* consisting of the Śaktis and female divinities of the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna pantheon (figs. 6, 9, 20, 21). It should be noticed in this connection that the pantheon of Bodhisattvas, their Śaktis and other cognate male and female divinities as represented in Ellora caves XI and XII, are much richer and fuller than either at Aurangabad or in other Buddhist caves at Ellora. Indeed, speaking from the point of view of art and iconographic forms, the Aurangabad caves seem to be contemporaneous with the early Buddhist caves at Ellora (II to X) and bear a formal affinity with the latter.

A *fourth* group consists of ancillary figures, like those of *mithuna* couples, *śālabhañjikās* or *vṛikshakās,* flying *gaṇas* and *gandharvas* dwarfs and *nāgas,* and certain animal friezes (figs. 11, 24, 25).

Here too, the art and iconographic forms are not altogether original, but belong to the common repository of forms of classical Gupta art and its extension in west-Indian caves.

But the most important group is the one, the *fifth*, that consists of four groups of kneeling devotees, two in cave III (figs. 14, 15, 16) and two in cave VI, and the dance composition in cave VII (figs. 18, 19). These bold reliefs are what may be considered as the highest point of achievement in sculptural form at Aurangabad and perhaps the most unique in the long and significant history of rock-cut sculptures of India.

Still there is a *sixth* group which comprises the relatively large figure of Gaṇeśa along with that of Śiva Ardhanārīśvara with his usual attributes, and the Saptamātṛikās. These figures are also in equally bold relief and belong to the same facial and physiognomical type as that of the figures in other caves (figs. 12, 13, 22, 23).

8. *Art Form and Style*

Throughout north India, particularly in the Gaṅgā-Yamunā valley and in eastern India, the Gupta culture period had already established the human figure as the main pivot of sculptural art. It had relegated the animal and vegetal world to the borders and panels where all animal patterns and vegetal scrolls carved with oblique cuts, exuberantly curl and uncurl themselves in playful contrasts of light and shade. The lively rhythm and ceaseless flow in bends and curves, of vegetal life seem to have been passed on to the human figure itself. This period and this region had also evolved a human frame full of youthful energy, shining in smoothness and transparently luminous in texture. At the same time the human body became the repository of an inner mental and physical discipline as well as of a deep intellectual and spiritual experience, all born of an intense discipline of the body and concentration of mind, and all externalised and made concrete with the help of a plastic modelling, linear flexibility, and poise and balance of pose and attitude unknown to any previous period of Indian art history.

The Deccan which had hardly ever fallen in line with the tradition of early narrative sculptures of Barhut or Sanchi, Bodhgaya or Mathura, had already evolved a heavy earth-bound type of human figure, more or less detached and away from the animal and vegetal world, as the pivot of its rock-hewn sculptural art. But the intellectual and spiritual ideology of Yogāchāra on the one hand and the sculptural tradition on the other, both of the Gupta culture period and of the north, were so overpowering and over-spreading that the Deccan could not but feel their impact and interpret the same in its own way and along the texture of its own rock-cut tradition. This tradition, in so far as the human figure was concerned, be it remembered, was already sturdier and more solid from the very beginning. Later it came to inherit the intellectual and spiritual ideology of Yogāchāra and hence the physical energy, inner and outer discipline, poise and balance and the inward self-absorption. But what it did not inherit was the fluid plastic quality of the

line and the modelling, the transparent luminosity and grace of the body itself, and the blissful and subdued smile of wisdom that lit up the face of the Sarnath Buddha and Bodhisattvas, for example.

The common denominator, therefore, of Deccanese rock-cut sculptures of the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries is then a more humanised human figure, with a relatively more elongated physiognomical form, but more sturdy and solid, plastically more compact, with full consciousness of latent physical energy to the point of stiffness at times, fully poised and balanced and a self-absorbed quiet dignity and detachment of attitude. In Brahmanical sculptures, however, fed by the new vision, energy and vigour of neo-Brahmanism, the human figure just described bursts forth in vigorous motion with all the latent energy expressing itself in dynamic movement. In the high reliefs of Brahmanical Badami and Parel, particularly of Ellora, the human figure is heavy and monumental in size and proportion; they are vigorous and dynamic in movement, and their radiating energy brings all other figures into integrated and dynamic compositions. In Buddhist sculptures, however, the figures are equally full of latent energy, vigour and dynamism, equally self-absorbed, equally strong and sturdy, but all these are held within bounds, in perfect poise and balance and in conscious dignity of pose and attitude. The humanistic element is strongly evident; yet at the same time there is a touch of intellectual and spiritual vision that imparts to the figures a dignified humility and an attitude of devotional surrender, and sometimes even a spiritual glow to some of these figures, as for example, in the main shrine of cave I at Ajanta, some of the Buddha and Bodhisattva figures at Ellora and Aurangabad and in the relief compositions of the devotees and the temple-dancer in caves III, VI and VII at Aurangabad.

Two facial and physiognomical types seem to have become standardised at Aurangabad. The physical frame from head to toe is an elongated one and there is hardly any trace of stumpiness or heavy drowsiness, as is evident in some of the sculptures at Ajanta. But there is a long series in which the figures are heavier and stumpier in proportion, and which can be easily distinguished from another type that is lighter, less sturdy and less heavy in proportion, if not slender or supple. In the first type the face is a round and

heavy one, while in the latter it is somewhat thinner and more elongated. The first type is presumably indigenous and aboriginal, a hypothesis that seems to find support in the figures of the devotees of cave III, in at least three or four figures of musicians in cave VII as well as in some other minor figures in cave II. The two Bodhisattva figures of cave III and at least two female figures of the so-called Tārā panel in cave VII, for example, fall in this category, while the majority of the figures of the so-called Tārā panel and the temple-dancer of cave VII, the Bodhisattvas of the same cave and of cave IX, for example, fall in the second group.

One character of composition that distinguishes west-Indian rock-cut reliefs from the Pallava rock-cut ones of the south, or, as a matter of that, early medieval sculptured slabs of cult divinities from the narrative reliefs of similar slabs of earlier periods, is the dominance in size and proportion as well as in the content of the theme of the central figure or figures that invariably occupy the focal point, all other accessory figures and contents being shown in relative diminution of size and proportion. Whether placed in the centre or at one side, the central figure dominates the scene and determines the placement of other figures in the composition; the latter only help in focusing physical and compositional attention to the main figure. There is one more point to notice in this connection. Since in the rock-cut caves the bare walls offer space enough for the figures to spread themselves out, there is hardly any crowding anywhere, and since there is no question of narration of a story as in the Pallava reliefs of Mahavalipuram, but only the concretisation of an idea or the central theme of a story, no introduction of a medley of figures is called for. On a bare wall, therefore, these central figures attracted the main attention of the onlookers. Other subsidiary figures or panels that were introduced when necessary, to fill up intervening and vacant spaces in a given composition, were only of secondary importance. The spatial relation of the figures was, therefore, an important element in any composition, the central figure thus being given enough space all around to enable it to spread itself out and radiate its total effect. In such figures the transition from light to shade and from shade to darkness, or *vice versa*, is always slow and gradual, so that there is no agitated effect

because of quick display of light and shade. In sharp distinction with the composition of the central figure is that of the subsidiary ones, where there is more crowding of figures and a more animated display of light and shade. But in the majority of the panels at Aurangabad subsidiary figures are very few, if at all.

Technically, the boldly carved reliefs of Aurangabad share the adequacy and competence of the age that had inherited the accumulated knowledge and experience of bygone centuries. In the jewellers' and ivory-cutters' decorations on the pillars and pilasters one notices how the slow but sure and deep oblique cuts bring forth into relief the intricate curves and counter curves. Here in the reliefs of human figures or of the lotus stalks and flowers or of animals, chisels are hammered in deep cuts with an inner slant so as to bring forth the volume in full rounded form, with the back only thinly linked to the background wall. These deep and graded cuts resulting in bold reliefs of the bodies arranged in a balanced composition, produces an equally balanced distribution of light and shade, imparting to the whole composition a total effect of life and movement.

The lines of the figures, whether of human or of the vegetal and animal world, are an inheritance of the Gupta classical tradition, and have the same flowing and plastically modelled quality. But it has neither the fluid flexibility nor the unceasing flow of that tradition. Since the line here, as in other rock-cut sculptures of the Deccan of the same period, holds within its boundaries a sturdier and more solid body, it moves in a slightly heavier tempo and seems to be more solid in texture.

Plastically, the figures answer perfectly to the demands of the line. The soft fluid and almost transparent modelling of the Gupta classical tradition of Sarnath is transformed here in the Deccan, presumably by the pressure of the indigenous tradition of rock-cut sculpture, into stronger, sturdier and more solid forms brought about by a more compact and condensed plasticity of modelling, fuller and perhaps more powerful in plastic effect, yet lithe and dynamic.

It has already been noticed that the central figure of the Buddha in the main shrines and in the chapels, invariably large in size and proportion, is seated on a high chair in *dharmachakra pravartana*

mudrā. The same pose and attitude of sitting can be seen in other Buddha panels as well, for example, in cave I and in several panels in cave II. Being minor panels, more or less decorative in character, they are relatively smaller in size and proportion. But there is another type of the Buddha figure where the Master is seated in what is called *padmāsana*, on a lotus seat, the Master's hands being held in the *dharmachakra mudrā*. The latter pose and attitude, that is the *padmāsana* and the *dharmachakra mudrā*, are, it is well known, in conformity with the Buddhist iconographic canon on the relevant topic. But what is more important is that, compositionally speaking, the balanced distribution of the masses into different volumes and planes, and their integration into one whole with the help of related linear movements, impart to the figure a lively naturalness and an easily poised existence. Compared to this the Aurangabad Buddha seated on a high chair has an iconic form which had already been made current originally in Gandhāra and later carried presumably through Mathura to Ajanta and Ellora (where too he occupies the privileged position in the central shrines); in this form the figure looks somewhat uneasy and rigid, simply because of the emphasised angular composition of the lines and triangular disposition of the masses. This composition invariably recalls that of the Kushāṇa seated royal portrait figures, the only saving grace at Ajanta, Ellora and Aurangabad being the softer plastic treatment of the subject. Indeed, the *padmāsana* conception and its formal concretisation are not only ideologically and iconographically significant but asethetically as well, whereas the other one does violence to both. It is, therefore, difficult to understand why the *dharmachakra pravartana* Buddha in this particular posture of sitting, was given so pre-eminent a position at Ajanta and Ellora, and more particularly at Aurangabad.

The Bodhisattva figures at Aurangabad are all almost invariably in a standing position, mostly in an *ābhaṅga* attitude, with their weight either on the left or on the right leg and hence the corresponding waist and thigh forming a slow formal curve. But there is at least one Bodhisattva, that of Avalokiteśvara in cave VII (fig. 3), who stands on a lotus in *samapadasthānaka*, one of the finest examples of similar sculptures anywhere in west-Indian caves. All such figures

are large and expansive in size and proportion, and their physiognomical elongation is further heightened by their high crowns. Weighty and majestic in appearance, dignified in gesture and attitude, holding all their latent energy stored in their broad shoulders and expanding chests, withdrawing themselves from the external world and looking inward with closed eyes and completely self-absorbed, these figures are formally and stylistically the forerunners of similar figures at Elephanta. Carved fully in the round in flowing but condensed and well-defined lines, these figures carry on the rich inheritance of Gupta classicism in an altered but more vital and dynamic form. The ideology of *karuṇā* or compassion that characterises the Buddha-Bodhisattva figures of Sarnath and gives them their soft fluidity and transparent luminosity, has here been interpreted in terms of energy held in the discipline of Yoga.

The feminine figures of Aurangabad are, however, struck in a different key. They are mostly in caves VII and IX and may be taken to represent the Śaktis of Bodhisattvas, though one may not be too sure about it. Nor can one definitely identify the female figures of the so-called Tārā panel in Cave VII as representations of the different forms of Tārā, their only cognisance being the lotus or the *nāgakeśara* flower held either in the right or in the left hand. The argument that in the supposedly Tārā panel the female figures are flanked by the Buddha on one side and a Bodhisattva on the other, is not by itself very convincing in this respect. It may, however, be noted in this connection that not a single female figure of any significance, of this panel, is in any iconographically established seated or standing position or is endowed with any usual mark of identification such as one meets with at Ellora. Besides the feminine figures just referred to, one may also take into account the *sālabhañjikās* and *vṛikshakās* serving as bracket figures, and the panel representing Kuvera and Hārīti in cave VII, in this connection.

The larger female figures at Aurangabad stand invariably in an *ābhaṅga* pose with their weight thrust on their right or left leg, the *ābhaṅga* position imparting to them a formal grace which is heightened by the corresponding incline of the head and the body. There are two easily distinguishable facial and physiognomical types, one relatively heavier with full, round faces with heavy lips, full, round and

heavy breasts, heavy body proportions with broad and heavy hips and thighs, and another with relatively suppler and more attenuated and elongated body and face with equally full and round breasts, but relatively thinner waist, hips and thighs. In the former type the plasticity of modelling is more compact and condensed being held by a tightened line (figs. 6, 7), while in the latter the plasticity is softer and subtler and the line more flexible (figs. 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21). But in both types there is a conscious attempt at bringing out in full the natural grace and rhythm that belong to the feminine figure. Even in their quiet dignity of pose and attitude, their perfect poise and balance and their complete self-absorption, their feminine charm has a quality of sensuousness that seems to have been consciously imparted by the artists.

One word needs be added as to the total compositional effect of the main and accessory figures of the so-called Tārā panel (figs. 20, 21). The vertical directions of the main figures along with their accessories, all in graceful curves, find harmonious response in each other and one another. The figures are separated from each other by deep cuts in the stone, casting deeper shadows and bringing the figures out into light, and yet they are joined together by an unceasing linear movement binding all the figures together into one integrated compositional whole. The bold and broad distribution of light and shade has imparted to the panel a meaning and significance that have lifted it from the level of mere representation to a higher level of aesthetic experience. Even the accessory figures have a place in the composition and a contribution to make to the total effect.

The figures that stand out against the walls of the recently discovered cave are all in a very bad state of preservation, and hence no close and precise examination leading to any clear and correct aesthetic judgment is possible. Yet from what remains of them one can easily see the same elongation of the figures, the same facial and physiognomical type and the same delicate *ābhaṅga* position of the Saptamātṛikā figures, as characterise the average feminine figures in other caves. Here too, there is the same quality of linear and plastic modelling and the same self-absorbed inward attitude and atmosphere and the same poise and dignity. But even so it seems that they

lack the latent energy and strength of their Buddhist counterparts at Aurangabad. This will be evident if one compares the figure of Ardhanārīśvara-Śiva with that of any of the Bodhisattvas. Indeed, these Brahmanical sculptures of Aurangabad do not seem to be informed by the spirit and vigour of neo-Brahmanism that are so characteristic of the Brahmanical sculptures of Ellora. On the contrary, formally and stylistically, and perhaps also ideologically, these Brahmanical sculptures are more in tune with their Buddhist neighbours at Aurangabad.

Besides the major figures of relatively larger sizes and dimensions and occupying pre-eminent positions there is quite a considerable number of minor compositions as parts of a total decorative design. These include the medallions and rectangular compositions on the pillars and pilasters, some of the feminine figures on the brackets as, for example, the one representing Hārīti holding on her hip and breasts her children, the flying couples and *gaṇas* etc. All such compositions share in the general technical efficiency and aesthetic characteristic of Aurangabad reliefs. Wrought in deep graded cuts the figures are brought out in bold rounded relief casting deep shadows and producing delightful distribution of light and shade. The medallions showing amorous men and women with attendants sporting in delightful dalliance, (fig. 25), seem to generate curving waves or ripples that spread themselves out beyond the rims of the circles on to their total vegetal composition. Of the flying couples and *gaṇas* some are distinctly heavier in proportion, and though they are supposed to be in actual flight through the atmosphere, their bodies are a little too heavy for the purpose. Yet it has to be admitted that they display a compositional rhythm and balance that seem to lighten to an extent the weight of their heavy bodies. But there are at least two compositions that are on a distinctly higher level of aesthetic achievement (fig. 24). Here too, the bodies are equally heavy, especially those of the male ones, with their broad shoulders and expanding chests. Yet the side-wise diagonal thrust of the bodies through the air, the apportionment in space of the various parts of the body, the rhythmic distribution of light and shade, and finally the direction of the linear composition stopping only at the toes,

make them appear as if swimming through the air in one composition, and floating in the other.

Before leaving this point of minor compositions a passing reference must be made to certain small figure-compositions at the corners of the lower portions of the shafts of the pillars and the pilasters (figs. 4, 5), as well as to some of those on the corners of capitals and on brackets. There are also certain other minor compositions elsewhere on the walls, and at the top of the doors and windows, one such composition being that of Gaja-Lakshmī in cave VII. Whatever be the content of the themes they represent, they are characterised by bold roundness of figures that are distinguished by the dignity and poise of their attitude, rhythmical linear composition and balanced distribution of volumes, but above all by a warm and lively display of light and shade, which together produce an effect of warm and lively sensuousness.

That the semi-darkness of the caves, perhaps only insufficiently lit by *ghee* or oil-lamps, helped the artists to some extent at least to produce the effect of light and shade, referred to above, can hardly be doubted. One has also reason to assume that the Aurangabad artists knew how to exploit this to their best of advantage. To prove this one has only to bring forward the evidence of the panels of the groups of devotees in caves III and VI, all the panels being situated in each case, on the side walls that are insufficiently lighted. It should be remembered that in both caves III and VI, the kneeling devotees are arranged on both sides against the side walls and with faces turned towards the central object of worship in the shrine, the seated Buddha on whom the direct light is supposed to fall. The figures of devotees have, therefore, to shine in semi-darkness. It is this contrast of light and shade that seems to heighten the effect of the attitude of deep devotion and intense self-absorption in which the figures are immersed. Moreover, the figures all cut in deep bold relief bringing forth almost fully rounded forms and arranged in two diagonally linear rows that accentuate the depth, casts deep, dark shadows in-between them. All these produce a mysterious interplay of light and darkness of graded tones and heighten the total aesthetic and spiritual effect the artists wanted to impart to each one of them individually and to all of them collectively. On a

descriptive level, one must notice the arrangement of the hair of the figures, either with the locks of heavy flowing curls arranged in wig-form or in simple round curls bound by a fillet centered by a jewelled decoration in front. One has no reason to doubt that such treatment of the hair and the head-dress was a legacy of the aboriginal tradition.

Relatively speaking, the two groups of devotees in cave VI are at a lower aesthetic level and seem to represent a different ethnic and social type. Their facial and physiognomical type, being thinner, lighter and more elongated, is different from that of the figures of cave III (figs. 14, 15, 16). Unfortunately all the figures in cave VI are in a very bad state of preservation.

But aesthetically perhaps the best and the most significant panel is preserved in cave VII. Here, on a side wall to the left of the main shrine is a panel of a girl in the full bloom of her youth, dancing in complete self-absorption and absolute surrender to the tune of music offered by a group of six youthful maidens playing their drums, flutes and cymbals, three on each side, the entire composition being conceived and executed in terms of an offering as if it were, to the Master seated in the sanctum (figs. 18, 19). The dancing figure itself poised in a moment of time in two delightfully sinuous curves flowing from top to bottom, and balanced on two sides by two pairs of delicate angles, is the pivot of the entire composition. The six figures, three on each side, are somewhat separated at forward angles by two deep shadows, one on each side, affording enough space for the dancer for her movements. Yet, integrated with her are the two groups of musicians arranged in two slightly angular but pronouncedly semi-circular curves that bind all the figures into one compositional whole. The display of light and shade keeps time and tune with those of the dance and music. The compositional unity is, therefore, not merely visual and aesthetic, but also conceptual and psychological, which imparts to the panel a deep human appeal, an appeal that is at once secular and spiritual. This would be equally evident in the soft but disciplined treatment of the plastic mass, nowhere so evident than in the treatment of the facial and abdominal muscles, of the waist and the finger movements of the hands and of the right leg with the tilted foot resting on

its toes. The total conception and execution of the attitude of the central figure are intended here not to represent a particular movement in the flux of time, but to give significant and eternal form to a state of being. The humanisation of an experience basically spiritual, could hardly ever be made visually more perceptible.

A formal and stylistic comparison between the Buddha and Bodhisattva figures and those of their semi-divine attendants on the one hand and the female figures of the so-called Tārā panel (cave II), or the semi-secular panels of devotees (cave III and VI) and the dance panel (cave VII) on the other, would at once reveal the difference in formal treatment of figures and their composition somewhat conditioned and determined by iconographic injunction on the one hand, and the form of figures and their composition which are not so conditioned and determined, on the other. The latter are frankly more free, varied and rich in conception and execution and hence more expressive of normal human experiences.

A similar comparison between the figures of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and their Śaktis at Ellora on the one hand and Aurangabad on the other, would equally reveal that the Ellora Buddhas are technically and formally on the same artistic level as those of Aurangabad. But what is more significant is that the forms of the Bodhisattvas of Aurangabad, even though somewhat conditioned and determined by iconographic injunctions, are much more free in their attitudes, *bhaṅgas* and *bhaṅgis*, than those at Ellora where by far the large majority of such figures are in various poses and attitudes, or standing rigidly in the usual *samapadasthānaka* attitude, poses and attitudes that are laid down in Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna iconographic texts. One or two rare panels in cave III of Ellora, for instance, present a series of Bodhisattvas in a row standing in a slight *ābhaṅga* attitude; but compared to the Bodhisattvas of Aurangabad the *bhaṅga* is halting and hesitant, and the row itself looks rigid and mechanical in composition, obviously because of canonical limitations.

But the relative freedom of attitudes, *bhaṅgas* and *bhaṅgis* and perceptual humanisation of form at Auranbagad, are nowhere so explicitly given expression to as in the semi-divine figures of the so-called Tārā panel and other feminine figures. At Ellora, all Śakti

figures are definitely formalised under the stress of canonical injunctions whereas at Aurangabad they seem to come out and ignore all dictates of iconographic form.

It is this difference that distinguishes the sculptures of Aurangabad from those of Buddhist Ellora.

At Ajanta, however, some of the central Buddha figures that occupy their pre-eminent position in the shrines, are definitely at a higher formal and aesthetic level than those at Aurangabad; but the ancillary reliefs at Ajanta, somewhat spongy and drowsy in their stumpy appearance, can hardly stand any comparison with similar reliefs at Aurangabad, though technically perhaps there is not much of a difference.

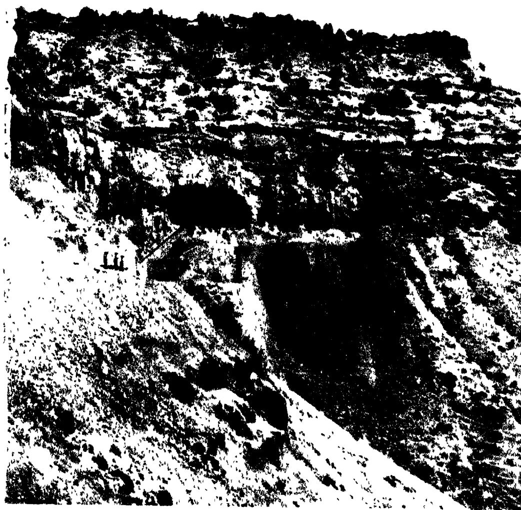
Indeed, the rock-cut sculptures, the shrine Buddhas excepted, are not the objects of pride at Ajanta; it is the paintings that must claim that distinction. And it is with the spirit and atmosphere of the paintings at Ajanta that the reliefs of Aurangabad have a very close affinity. The pose and attitude of the well-known painted version of Padmapāṇi Bodhisattva (cave I) at Ajanta, is a near relation of its sculptured counter-part at Aurangabad, while the groups of devotees (caves III and VI) and the youthful temple-dancer with her musician companions have their painted counter-parts in many a painted panel at Ajanta. Indeed, the spirit and atmosphere breathed by the painted walls of the caves at Ajanta echo in the sculptured panels of Aurangabad.

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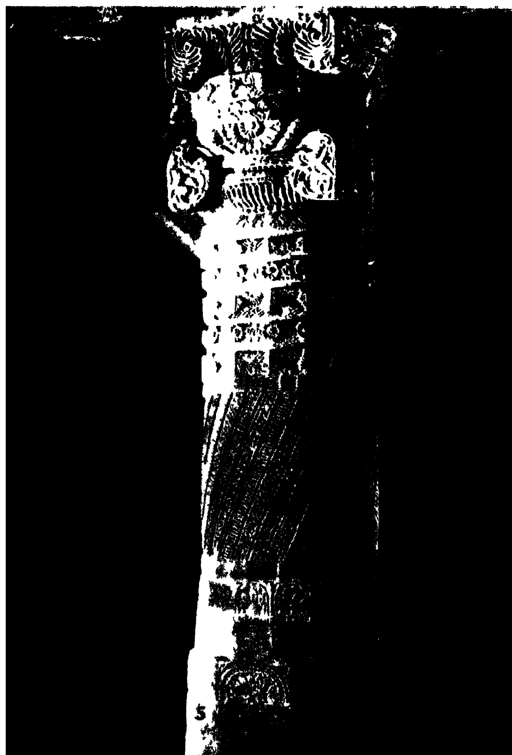
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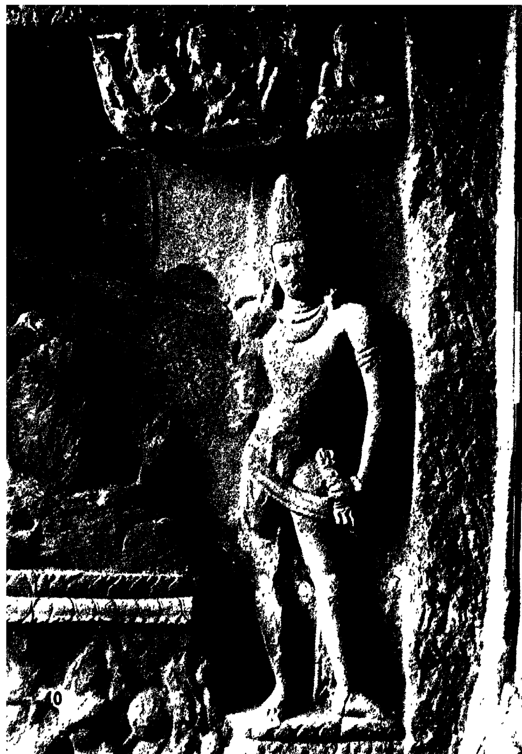





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